



California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

November 14, 2025

Tunnel Vision: A Gopher's Road to Recovery

In October, a Botta's Pocket Gopher was brought to CWC by West Valley Animal Control. CWC is in regular contact with animal control agencies across the county. We have a dedicated team of transport volunteers, who brave the Los Angeles traffic to bring patients from the shelters into our hospital for care. The patient was transported and admitted with suspected blunt force trauma to the face, from an unknown cause.

Upon intake, the patient was observed to have clicky breathing and signs of trauma to their face. They were quickly provided with an oral antibiotic, anti-inflammatory medication and given fluids. The patient was put on cage rest to reduce movement and encourage healing.



A Botta's Pocket Gopher patient in enclosure.

Botta's Pocket Gophers often get a bad rap for their prolific digging. However, these little creatures are more than just the holes they make! In fact, their digging activities often help to aerate and mix the soil, leading to fertile gardening and farming land. The Botta's Pocket Gopher in particular is super adaptable and can live in a variety of places, mostly due to the fact that they dig with their teeth as opposed to their claws, like other species of gophers. Remarkably, they are capable of closing their lips behind their incisors, preventing soil from entering their mouths while digging. Due to this digging style, the texture and density of where they live, dig and burrow can vary, though they are primarily found in the diverse landscapes typical of Western North America.

The Botta's Pocket Gopher gets their name from the pockets in their mouths, used to store food and nesting materials while they are on a digging mission. These pockets are fur lined and can be emptied by turning them inside out. The pocket gopher is herbivorous and eats a variety of different plant matter.

Following 23 days of rehabilitation and a successful performance on their dig test-which assesses a gopher's ability to carry out essential natural behaviors-the Botta's Pocket Gopher was released back into the wild, ready to dig and explore once again.